

# Modern tradition

Photos Garth Cooper & Colin Jarman



Combining the looks of an ‘old gaffer’ with construction using modern materials, the Cornish Shrimper is an enduringly popular trailer-sailer and coastal cruiser. To assess her abilities, [Garth Cooper](#) went for a sail on the Blackwater.

As a co-author of *East Coast Pilot*, Colin Jarman wanted a boat with a shallow enough draught to enable him to literally crawl up to the tops of creeks and be able to explore waters only accessible by dinghy in the past. Also to take the ground comfortably if the water ran out. What he chose was the pretty, gaff rigged Cornish Shrimper. At 19ft over the deck, plus a stubby 3ft bowsprit, traditional style wide-planked (GRP) hull, full width coachroof and tan sails, she looks exactly as a traditional small East Coast yacht should.

“The Cornish Shrimper is the best compromise I could find. She can be trailed, raced, cruised or used to potter about in shallow creeks. She’s got few vices, is easy to rig and sail and yet is large enough to spend a weekend or even a few days living aboard. The only thing I would change if starting the design from scratch would be to reduce the length of the cockpit and increase the size of the accommodation below by the same amount,” explained Colin. “But that’s a purely personal preference.”

“I would best describe living on board as camping on water. The facilities are pretty basic compared to a larger yacht, but you can set up a tent canopy for the cockpit, which gives you a sensible sitting area with more headroom and you could sleep two on mattresses on the cockpit benches,” he added.

With even less time these days to take to the water, buying the Shrimper, which he and his wife, Mary, named *Gypsy*, gave him the flexibility to pop down the road from his West Mersea home to the boat and go out for a couple of hours, which he admits he couldn’t do so easily with his previous boat, a double-ended Victoria 26. “And quite honestly, I’m happier these days pottering about the creeks. If I want to go blue water then I’ll go with friends on their larger boats,” he commented.

## Going aboard

Arriving at *Gypsy*’s mooring, courtesy of the West Mersea Yacht Club water taxi, my first impression was of just how pretty and well put together she looks,

and how totally at home she is in her environment. She’s most definitely not a boat to be moored alongside a crowded marina berth.

Stepping aboard she rolls a little, but with an up-plate draught of a mere 18in, this is understandable. Once aboard her she’s pretty solid. The cockpit is big for



such a small hull, but the feet of the two main berths extend under the forward ends of the cockpit benches. There's also a large space between the foot of each bunk and the forward cross bulkhead of the lazarette and outboard well, which is filled with solid foam flotation material (there's more up forward), so she's virtually unsinkable.

The forward part of the cockpit well is taken up with a sloping engine box-cum-storage locker. In this space Colin has the battery and plenty of space to store bulky items such as the boom cover and long warps. If you have the inboard engine version (Yanmar 1GM10) then the outboard well to starboard becomes another stern locker.

The lazarette contains the strapped down remote fuel tank for the outboard (Mariner 6hp four-stroke) and the main bilge pump. It also swallows fenders, warps, tool kits and a host of other gear.

The two part, wood and Perspex washboards and a sensibly sized sliding hatch give access below. The step makes a good space to sit and survey the world while the helmsman goes about his business. Probably the most comfortable lounging position is facing aft and leaning back against the aft bulkhead of the saloon with your legs comfortably stretched out. On a warm, sunny day it was easy to feel soporific and all but doze off.

### Getting underway

Preparing *Gypsy* for sea proved remarkably easy. All control lines are brought back to the cockpit through a bank of clutches on the starboard side of the main hatch. There's a winch too, used to tighten (straighten) the headsail luff spar, but also available for setting the mainsail if needed. You only go up on the coachroof/deck to remove the sail cover and ties and to let slip the mooring. Hoisting the main was simply a matter of hauling on two halyards, the throat and peak, together and locking off. The topping lift passes through a jammer mounted on the starboard side of the boom. The headsail is carried on a Sailspar roller foil worked with a continuous line, so there is no pulling on the sheets and stressing the sail itself. Nor is there a lot of spare line lying around in the cockpit.

The main has simple slab reefs with lines at both ends of the boom and again it's all done from the main hatch.

Motoring down the Strood Channel through Thorn Fleet and past the old



oyster packing shed on Packing Marsh Island, the Mariner 6 horse proved adequate if noisy, pushing us along at about 4kn at half throttle.

Clear of the tightly packed moorings we hoisted sails (by Norfolk sailmaker Jeckells) and bore away up the Blackwater in a fluky SE F3 breeze and she was quickly chuckling along at 5kn over the ground with a bit more in some of the slightly stronger gusts. She was light on the helm, rounding up gently and with no fuss if you let go the tiller. Rather like a big dinghy, she can be almost whipped round, pivoting on her

4ft deep centreplate.

She'll point around 50° off the wind and likes to be sailed full rather than sheeted hard in. Off the wind or running, she's smooth, vice free and soon has water chuckling under the moulded lands along her hull. Although we had ideal pottering weather, Colin has sailed her in some pretty heavy and gusty winds, often putting her portholes under water.

"The first time was bit scary," he said. "But when I looked over the side I realised we'd got a long way still to go before water came anywhere near the cockpit coamings. I can see why people



race these boats, they'll produce quite a turn of speed and once in the groove it's sheer pleasure."

### Going gaff

The gaff rig is one that exerts little strain on the crew or the boat, so there are no

sheet winches. The jib is controlled with sheets coming back into the cockpit through bull's eyes and jammers and the aft mounted mainsheet is a simple 3:1 purchase with a bottom jammer mounted on a short length of track across the transom. All the fittings are by Barton.

As a guide to their general capabilities, the Royal Hospital School at Holbrook has a fleet of Shrimpers in which students cruise up and down the East Coast – they're often seen out and about shepherded by a large orange RIB as a safety boat. There have been well over a thousand Shrimpers built since Roger Dongray designed her in 1978 and there's a very active class association.

When de-rigging to put her on her trailer it's simply a matter of attaching a long line to the bottom of the forestay fitting, letting the forestay go free and lowering the mast aft by swivelling it around the retaining bolt in the tabernacle. It's a two-man (or in Colin's case one man and his wife) job.

### Below decks

The accommodation is extraordinarily comfortable with a long single berth each side with a couple of drop-in boards that widen them at the shoulders. The cabin is divided by the centreboard casing and it would be possible to construct a simple





Above left: Port berth with infill for shoulders. Above right: Berths without infills, centreplate and galley. Below: The Porta-Potti under the cabin step.

table to perch on top of it. Forward of the berths to port is a gimbaled single ring gas burner, alongside which is a square section plastic sink/bucket with a pump drawing water from a plastic container stored within the work surface and to starboard is a large locker space for provisions. It's simple, but it all works.

*Gypsy* has the Classic layout with a full width bulkhead at the forward end of the cabin with large opening doors to reveal a spacious storage area in the bow. In the eyes of the boat is another sealed flotation section. The spare berth cushions, extension boards, bedding and the like go in here. Colin has built a crockery rack into this space as well.

At the aft end of the cabin, alongside

the main step, is space for storing a Porta-Potti camping loo. All mod cons in a relatively small space; fortunately, both Colin and Mary are disciplined enough to ensure that there's a proper place for everything and everything goes in its place. There's no room for being untidy.

We had a great day pottering about on the Blackwater on board *Gypsy*. I'd have happily carried on but deadlines loomed. The Shrimper is definitely an ideal small boat for exploring the myriad muddy creeks with which the East Coast abounds. And at about 1¼ tons she's within the scope of most people to tow to new destinations without having to face the cold, grey North Sea too often. A good trailer sailer and a good cruiser. **EC**



Below: The foredeck well provides simple anchor and cable stowage.



## Verdict

Pretty, practical, pricey.

## Specifications

Length inc. bowsprit	22ft 6in (6.85m)
LOA	19ft 3in (5.87m)
LWL	17ft 7in (5.33m)
Beam	7ft 2in (2.18m)
Draught plate up/down	1ft 6in/4ft (0.46/1.2m)
Displacement	2350lb (1065kg)
Sail area	194ft <sup>2</sup> (18.02m <sup>2</sup> )
Engine	Outboard: various 4-6hp Inboard: Yanmar 1GM10 9hp

RCD category C

Cabin layout – three versions

1. Classic with two berths and large forward locker.
2. 2 + Loo with sea toilet and forward locker.
3. 2 + 2 with forward V-berths.

Designer

Roger Dongray

Price

From £23,850 (outboard)

From £31,900 (inboard)

Builder

Cornish Crabbers

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